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REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS

Follow-up to the Regional Conference to Address the Problems of
Refugees, Displaced Persons, Other Forms of Involuntary
Displacement and Returnees in the Countries of the Commonwealth
of Independent States and Relevant Neighbouring States

Report of the Secretary-General

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* A/52/150 and Corr.1.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 51/70 of 12 December 1996, in which the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in close cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), was requested to continue to steer the ongoing and future activities in the implementation of the Programme of Action adopted by the Regional Conference to Address the Problems of Refugees, Displaced Persons, Other Forms of Involuntary Displacement and Returnees in the Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Relevant Neighbouring States, held at Geneva on 30 and 31 May 1996. The Secretary-General was asked to report to the Assembly at its fifty-second session on the measures taken and proposed and on progress achieved.

2. In the same resolution, the General Assembly urged all States and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations concerned to take further action to implement the recommendations of the Conference, calling upon the Governments of the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to continue to strengthen their commitment to the principles underlying the Programme of Action and to ensure progress in its implementation, and upon other States and interested international organizations to provide appropriate levels of support in a spirit of solidarity and burden-sharing.

II. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION

3. Follow-up mechanisms have been established within UNHCR and IOM to ensure the implementation of the Programme of Action, in close cooperation with concerned States and intergovernmental organizations. A number of strategies and initiatives to implement the Programme of Action were undertaken and are outlined below.

4. The close cooperation of the three organizations that constituted the CIS Conference secretariat (UNHCR, IOM, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)) has continued to be strong in the first year of implementation of the Programme of Action. The Joint Operational Strategy for 1996-2000 between UNHCR and IOM, which was welcomed as a practical step outlining the dimensions of implementation, was put into operation with the drawing up of national implementation plans in each country of the Commonwealth of Independent States, with the active participation of the Governments concerned. This joint planning exercise provided the basis for a comprehensive presentation of all UNHCR and IOM programmes in all CIS countries, showing coordinated activities designed to mutually support each other and avoid duplication. The two organizations made a joint appeal for funds in November 1996, thus providing a channel through which States or interested organizations could support the implementation of the Programme of Action. The cooperation of OSCE, and in particular the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, is expected to grow closer next year according to decisions taken by the Permanent Council to support the process more actively.

5. Most Governments of the Commonwealth of Independent States have demonstrated commitment to these principles and several have paid increased attention to strengthening the institutional framework appropriate for effective management of migration and displacement. They have elaborated or revised related legislation and ensured that appropriate administrative structures are in place. Many have promoted human rights. Some have paid particular attention to the protection of minority rights and maintenance of peaceful inter-ethnic relations, and have made efforts to reduce statelessness. Some have acceded to or are preparing to accede to various international instruments, including the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, and some have become members of the Council of Europe. Others have paid particular attention to providing assistance for the integration of newly arrived populations from other CIS countries. In some areas, bilateral and subregional mechanisms are being strengthened to ensure a coordinated response to shared problems.

6. Other States and interested organizations have lent support to the implementation process through funding the joint appeal of UNHCR and IOM and through other bilateral and multilateral channels, including the provision of technical assistance for migration management and development of legislation, and emergency and integration assistance for refugees and internally displaced persons. The levels of assistance for non-emergency programmes have not been high, however, and it remains a challenge for all participants of the CIS Conference to ensure that political and financial support consolidates their commitment to the preventive strategy agreed upon at the CIS Conference.

7. UNHCR has paid particular attention to strengthening its own regional policies and approaches, developing strategies and practical tools for more effective capacity-building, enhancing or launching programmes to address the needs of various categories of concern to the CIS Conference (including, more recently, involuntarily displaced persons and formerly deported peoples). UNHCR has sought to develop partnerships with other organizations to meet the challenge of implementing the Programme of Action, acting sometimes as a catalyst for action, drawing attention to issues that can best be addressed by other actors, or drawing the expertise of others into joint activities. Thus, initiatives have been taken to forge closer contacts with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural organization (UNESCO), the Council of Europe and the European Union (Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS)). Cooperation with financial institutions is still at an early stage, with efforts being made to understand one another's policy-making and planning processes in general and to cooperate specifically in some CIS countries.

8. IOM has concentrated on the four main areas of its core expertise: migration management, integration assistance, migration assistance, and research and information activities, including the facilitation of workshops and seminars on migration-related issues. In the year since the CIS Conference, IOM has expanded its programmes in the Commonwealth of Independent States where it was already active and has launched new but similar programmes in others. Cooperation with UNDP has expanded (including the signing of an executing agency agreement) and joint activities are now being carried out with the International

Labour Organization in the field of labour migration. IOM is developing an inventory of the technical and financial assistance programmes being carried out in the Commonwealth of Independent States to provide all interested parties with a full picture of the initiatives under way in the migration field.

9. Other international organizations have also been active in the region: UNDP has assisted internally displaced persons in Georgia (South Ossetia) and the reintegration of returnees in Crimea, Ukraine. Efforts focus on improving the infrastructure and access to social services, aiming, in the long run, at increased stability and peace in these regions. UNDP will assist the Government of Azerbaijan in reconstruction and rehabilitation of war-damaged provinces in the country. UNICEF has been promoting the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child among Central Asian countries and has included peace education, tolerance education and conflict-resolution elements in its programmes in Tajikistan and the three countries of the Trans-Caucasus. In Crimea, Ukraine, UNICEF plays a role in the United Nations Crimea Integration and Development Programme, providing basic educational and medical supplies for community centres and polyclinics.

10. The role of non-governmental organizations in implementing the Programme of Action was recognized to be crucial and Governments of the Commonwealth of Independent States were urged to strengthen their cooperation with local and national non-governmental organizations. In many countries, significant steps have been made in this regard, and a constructive dialogue is developing. Non-governmental organizations themselves have become more aware of the issues, have improved their links and cooperation with one another, with the Government and with international organizations, and most CIS countries have become increasingly active in implementing various aspects of the Programme of Action. Several initiatives designed to facilitate their coordination and their participation in the CIS Conference implementation and follow-up have been carried out by UNHCR, which has the main responsibility for ensuring that non-governmental organizations are involved at all levels. Both UNHCR and IOM have been steadily increasing cooperation with non-governmental organizations in the region through the implementation of programmes.

III. FOLLOW-UP: REVIEW OF PROGRESS MADE BY THE STEERING GROUP

11. On 31 October 1996, a preliminary meeting of the Steering Group, foreseen in the Programme of Action to monitor progress in implementation, took place to set up modalities and procedures. On 2 July 1997, the Steering Group met to review progress after the first year of implementation. Participants included 45 States, 21 international organizations, 73 non-governmental organizations and 4 other entities. A report compiled by UNHCR and IOM and outlining progress made in each of the CIS countries provided the basis for this review.

12. At the Steering Group meeting, the CIS countries reaffirmed their commitment to implementing the Programme of Action and outlined several measures and initiatives they had taken in the past year. Many have focused on strengthening the institutional framework for managing migration and displacement problems. The Governments of Georgia and Tajikistan highlighted the importance of commitment to conflict-resolution processes and the need for

concerted efforts at reconciliation. Several Governments in the region noted that much more could be done to implement the Programme of Action, if given the necessary resources. Other Governments confirmed their interest in and support for the efforts of the CIS countries, pointing to the bilateral and multilateral assistance they were providing. Four countries announced contributions to the UNHCR/IOM joint appeal for 1997. Non-governmental organizations made interventions, which served to highlight the acute nature of the problems of the displaced in the Commonwealth of Independent States. The progress made in enhancing the awareness and capacity of non-governmental organizations in the migration sector in those countries was noted, and Governments of the Commonwealth of Independent States were urged to pay attention to creating an enabling environment for non-governmental organizations to function more effectively, particularly in the realm of non-governmental organization and tax legislation.

13. Participants expressed their appreciation for the efforts of UNHCR and IOM to implement the Programme of Action, and encouraged increased coordination of activities. They also welcomed an increased role for OSCE. In concluding the meeting, the Chairman urged all participants in the CIS Conference to cooperate in the long-term endeavour of implementing the Programme of Action and to maintain the balance of commitments and interests that was essential in the process leading up to the CIS Conference. In order not to lose the current momentum, demonstrable progress must be made in the Commonwealth of Independent States to prioritize Conference-related issues in the second year of implementation, and support from the other members of the international community must be forthcoming.
